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BIBLIOGRAPHIC STYLE IN  
MEDICAL LITERATURE.

BY

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# BIBLIOGRAPHIC STYLE IN MEDICAL LITERATURE.

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THE purpose of this paper is to call the attention of the man of medicine to the importance of the bibliography. In the sense in which I use it here "bibliography" means the list of references appended to the usual article in medical periodical literature.

Schools and colleges devote courses to composition of literary material. Libraries have been written on how to write. But who cares about the bibliography? Even the library schools lay little emphasis on the necessity of bibliographic instruction of authors. Practically a doctor begins to realize what constitutes a bibliography when he is preparing his first work of research for publication; but too often it does not get his interest or his care. By way of groundwork there are a few books and articles that the would-be author should read. First and foremost stands De Vinne's *Correct Composition*.<sup>1</sup> This is a really important work, reducing to a common denominator printer, publisher, and author. A French work by Thil<sup>2</sup> takes up the general subject of preparing a medical paper and of going through the literature for a given subject; while Allbutt<sup>3</sup> gives general observations on composition. Shorter, and bearing more specifically upon the present subject, are papers by L. N. Wilson,<sup>4</sup> Rolleston,<sup>5</sup> Fisher,<sup>6</sup> Eliot,<sup>7</sup> H. Wilson,<sup>8</sup> and the pamphlet, "Bibliographic Style,"<sup>9</sup> which should be on the reference shelf of every literary physician.

The librarian appreciates the bibliography more

than any other person. To him come bibliographies many times a day, while the physician may not use a bibliography once in a month. The strange, not to say weird, references that the librarian is asked to locate lead him to think that many writers have no idea what the bibliography is for, that they don't care, or that they make up their bibliographies out of pure imagination. Therefore, as a librarian, I wish to state for the bibliography some of the reasons for its being, what it should be, and certain ideas which should obtain in its making. These reasons will, I hope, persuade my readers to give the bibliography its proper share of care, that it may most completely and correctly fulfil its purpose.

A majority of medical articles review, or depend largely upon, other writings. To indicate both to the writer and to the reader the sources from which this foundation comes is the province of the bibliography, or list of references. This list varies in its character with the nature of the writer and of the article which it accompanies. The article which gives merely an outline of a subject may have for its basis a text-book or a monograph, in which case the bibliography may be of the simplest. On the other hand, the worker who spends years on a special line of research and reads hundreds of articles will give to his report a long list of references, amounting perhaps to several pages, citing books, magazine articles, pamphlets, and the like.

From the writer's point of view, the bibliography is of importance. It retains in permanent form a record of the authorities he has used, to which he may need to refer at some future time. It shows how many or how few have held his opinion, or have differed. It may, too, be a select list, selected to show the progress of his subject historically, or the work of men who have added their might or

nite thereto. The reader, however, will want to know in addition to the points noted above: "How accurately has the author quoted his authorities?" or "Is he justified in drawing such a conclusion from this author?" or "What is So-and-So's method or technique?" The bibliography should be the key opening the way to the required information; it should afford a means of getting before the reader the right articles in the least time.

For purposes of defense and offense, therefore, each item of a bibliography should have certain qualities, lacking which it is by so much deficient and reduced in usefulness. These qualities are completeness and correctness. To be complete, the reference should tell: (1) Who wrote the article (the author). (2) What it is about (the title). (3) When it was published (the date). (4) Where it is to be found (if a periodical, its name and where in it).

Completeness and correctness are not synonymous. A citation may be complete but not correct. It frequently happens that an incorrect reference is worse than none at all; for much time is spent in searching literature for that which does not exist. Thus, "Niles, *Amer. Jour. Med. Sci.*, 1911, CXLI, 79," may through carelessness of author and typesetter become in print, "Miles, *Jour. Med.*, 1901, CXI, 179." Such accidents do happen. To condemn a reader to spend hours wading through the literary deluge in search of such an article partakes of the nature of a crime. The proposed aid becomes a serious obstacle, for it causes loss of time and unnecessary work, not for one person only but for many in many times and places. Even when found the paper may amount to nothing; but it has to be discovered before its uselessness becomes known. In the eyes of those to whom he has caused such loss of time



and energy an author's work is not likely to rise in value.

Incompleteness is probably the most frequent fault in bibliographies. To measure up to the standard of completeness, the references should be as full of fact as are the items in the Index-Catalogue<sup>10</sup> and the Index Medicus.<sup>11</sup> These items may be grouped under two heads: monographs and periodical articles; or more closely, "independents" and "analyticals." By the first, the monograph or independent, we mean the book or pamphlet published by itself under its own title (not a reprint). The analytical is the article printed in a periodical, or the monograph which is printed in a "system" or "handbook."

A reference to an independent should include these details: (*a*) author's name with initials; (*b*) title of book; (*c*) edition, other than the first; (*d*) place of publication; (*e*) date of publication, or nearest ascertainable date when title-page reveals none; (*f*) the page, or pages, if a particular one is referred to. Here is such a reference: Campbell, F. R. *The Language of Medicine*. N. Y. 1888. p. 203-286.

A reference to an analytical should contain: (*a*) author's name with initials; (*b*) title of article; (*c*) title of periodical in which found (usually in abbreviated form); (*d*) place of publication, except when the city's name appears in the title; (*e*) date (year) of issue; (*f*) series and volume numbers; (*g*) pages covered by the article (p. 203-286), or the first page only (p. 203). In ordinary lists the latter form is quite sufficient. Such references are these:

Mosenthal, H. O. *A Case of Pancreatic Diabetes Mellitus*. *Arch. of Internal Med.*, Chic., 1912, IX, 339.

Coryllos, P. *Adamantinome kystique du maxil-*

laire inférieur. *Bull. et mém. de la Soc. anat. de Paris*, 1911, LXXXVI (sér. 6, XIII), 520.

Collins, J. Aphasia. *Modern Med.* (Osler). Phil. & N. Y., 1910, VII, 308.

In spite of what I have said as to the necessity of including certain data, an author must use his judgment or take expert advice in each reference as to what details should be indicated. This may seem paradoxical, but it is not. Let me illustrate, first with the page number. The American Druggist and Pharmaceutical Record uses two sets of page numbers. Each issue is paged by itself and also with the numbers that are its share in the complete volume. Thus, instead of indicating Walsh's article as 1911, LIX, 23 (p. 23 is only that page in the number of the issue for August 14), give it as 1911, LIX, 73. Again, take the reference of Coryllos above. Volume 13 alone might be mistaken for the 13th volume of the journal published in 1838. On the other hand, insufficient lettering may give only volume 13. In either case the reference has the right number indicated. Or it may be that there are other kinds of numbers to be indicated. That is, one must give the number of "année" or "Jahrgang." A good example of this occurs to me in the *Revue Neurologique*. In this journal tomes I-XVI coincide with années 1-16, but année 17 contains tomes XVII and XVIII and année 18 contains tomes XIX and XX. In a reference to a "Supplement," "Ergänzungsband," "Festband" and the like, indication of it must follow the volume number when its paging is separate from that of the volume it accompanies. And again, the individual monthly or separate issues may be the only thing to give, as in: Boss, S. Ueber Gonosan-Ersatz. *Berliner Klinik*, Okt. 1911, Jg. 23, Heft 280, 15-21. In fact, such variations in periodicals are legion.

Periodical titles and their abbreviations should be a matter of concern to the author. In most cases an abbreviated title is possible, and as a matter of economy is necessary, but it should never be allowed to degenerate into a cryptogram. The shortened form should indicate to the reader the words abbreviated, and, not less important, the language thereof. "Arch. Oph." rather should be "Arch. f. Ophthal." "Arch. d'ophthal," or "Arch. of Ophthal." The inclusion of the place of publication aids in the identification of the journal. Such an abbreviation as "A. f. O." may be used, as in von Noorden's book,<sup>12</sup> if a key to the titles accompanies the list. On the other hand, it is hardly wise to use the full titles, even with the words abbreviated, in the case of a few, usually German, periodicals. Instead of writing "Jahresb. ü. d. Leist. u. Fortsch. a. d. Geb. d. Neurol. u. Psychiat." one may use "Jahresb. Neurol u. Psychiat."

Do not translate titles. Do not clip them of important words. "Deutsche Zeitschrift für Chirurgie" is neither "Zeitschrift für Chirurgie," nor is it the "German Journal of Surgery" for purposes of reference. If the reader is unfamiliar with German, a translated title will lead him astray; if he does read that language he needs no translation.

Above all—and this is the law and the prophets—take no one's word for the accuracy of a reference. Verify each one yourself, even if it take some time. It probably will take time: out of each ten of your friend's references five will be incomplete and four incorrect. And finally when your own bibliography in proof comes from the printer—Doctor, this is for *you*—take your corrected proof and with no aid from the copy, look up in the magazines themselves each and every one of the items in your list. Better yet, let someone who is unfamiliar with your subject verify and correct



your proof. Only then can you feel that your bibliography is fit to print.

To ask for all these details and for such care is not unreasonable. Let me show how in actual use these items are helpful; how one item acts as a check on a mistake in some other item. First, the author's name, to one acquainted with the workers in a particular field, affords a clue to the value of the paper. In event of error in other parts of the reference, the author's name is of great service in the search through indexes. Further, his initials identify him when we find several writers of the same name. The name is fixed, while the subject-entry of our article may be uncertain, or, in an unfamiliar language, unknown. The author's name is doubly important when, through lack of space, titles of articles are omitted. Swale Vincent<sup>13</sup> prints a long bibliography which is a good example of a most condensed form. He gives author, journal, date, volume, and page. While not always consistent he shows how sources may be located with a large number of entries in small space.

Suppose, again, that the author's name is wrongly printed and other data are insufficient or misprinted. Here the presence of the title gives a final chance to locate our elusive article by "sleuthing" through subject indexes and other bibliographies.

That an entry needs the title of the journal which contains the article seems self-evident; yet the frequency with which all reference to a journal is omitted seems to be reason enough for devoting this paragraph to some axiomatic statements: Put down on paper all the facts in the reference while it is before you; don't leave it to memory. Don't take anything for granted, and don't leave anything to the imagination: your readers are not mind readers.

The place of publication differentiates magazines

of the same or similar titles, and in the case of independents (books) serves to identify editions and aids in the ordering and purchase of the same. This item is practically of the least importance and may be omitted without seriously impairing the usefulness of a bibliography.

Of most importance are the date, volume number and page number. I give these three together because they are interdependent and each acts as a check on a mistake in one of the others. I will show how, lacking one of these items, the reference is defective and may entail considerable delay in discovering the article cited. Take this reference: "Lancet, Lond. II, 359." Inasmuch as each year's issues of this journal since 1844 have been published as two separate volumes, 1 and 2, this reference may be in any one of sixty-eight volumes. The date at once fixes the volume: "Lancet, Lond., 1909, II, 359." Suppose now we have only the date: "Arch. f. path. Anat., Berlin, 1882." In this case we have to look through four volumes, and in each one not an index but two pages of "Inhalt." As this "Inhalt" is almost solid print with no catch-words, change in type or conspicuous position for items, the time consumed is considerable. Even "1882, XC" leaves us with two pages of reading, but "1882, XC, 549" enables one to put his finger on the volume and on the article itself in 10 seconds. In referring to journals in several series, an entry which gives the various volume numbers often aids by corresponding to the various ways in which such journals are bound and labeled, thus: "C. r. . . . Soc. de biol., Paris, 1886, XXXVIII (Sér. 8, III). 21."

There is scarcely a case in which either the year or volume number cannot be found in the journal from which you are making a citation. I will not say *no* case, for the ways of publishers are some-

times past finding out. Such a thing can be. For this reason, too, let no man say unto himself, "What does the lack of a page number signify? Let 'em look it up in the index." And alas! what an index it may be! The index in the volume referred to may be missing. It may never have been published. If present, it may be as weird as that of the Dental Review, in six or eight alphabets, and with entries like this under T: "The use of a normal salt solution." It may be only a table of contents set up "solid"; or the index may be in Volume 2 which is not yet completed.

As good an example as one is likely to find of a carefully made, consistent bibliography is that appended to a recent work of Harvey Cushing.<sup>14</sup> It is worthy of emulation by every medical author.

Having decided on the form of the entries in his bibliography, the author should have constantly before him the typical entry which shall be his guide. That is, if he has decided to give titles of articles in his references, let him use titles consistently in every citation. If he uses Roman letters for his volume numbers, he should do so in every case. If he capitalizes important words in one entry, let him do so in all. If he begins German nouns with small letters, he should not capitalize the English nouns and adjectives. If he follows German usage in capitalizing German words, let him follow French usage in the French words. Famulener's<sup>15</sup> and Cushing's<sup>14</sup> bibliographies are examples of consistency, though they differ from each other in style.

Having considered its parts, let us look at the bibliography as a whole. The question here is of arrangement. Several methods are followed, of which I will speak of four. One way is to enclose in parentheses in the text immediately following the author's name the reference to the book or article. "We are indebted to Schloss (*Amer. Jour.*

*Dis. of Children*, Chic., 1912, III, 341). " This system is not frequently followed. Another method is to use a superior figure or character immediately after the mention of the author's name, or allusion to his work, with the character repeated at the foot of the page with the bibliographic reference. This mixes the ordinary footnotes with the bibliography, but is very widely used; as for instance, in the *American Journal of the Medical Sciences*. A third system, to my mind the most useful, especially for longer bibliographies, is the use of figures as noted above, but running in consecutive order to the end of the article, with the references collected at the end, in column form, as in the *MEDICAL RECORD*, or less clearly but more compactly, in solid type, as in the *New York Medical Journal*. A variation of this arrangement is to arrange the references in the alphabetical order of the author's names, number them in that order and then assign the numbers to their respective positions in the text. This is the method employed in Cushing's<sup>14</sup> bibliography. Still another method is to omit figures in the text and arrange entries of the bibliography alphabetically. This is confusing in the case of several entries by the same author, but is the form employed in the dissertations of the "Faculté de Médecine de Paris." In any event, the author will do well to submit his manuscript to an editor, or a bibliographic expert, before sending it to the publisher; or at least, to take as an example, a well rounded, careful and consistent bibliography already published. As a guide, the pamphlet "Bibliographic Style,"<sup>9</sup> already referred to, will be a valuable aid.

When one surveys the far horizon of the field of medical literature, he can see the value and necessity of definitiveness, of accuracy and completeness in references. Strangely enough, though, writers



who have been tried by the mistakes in the work of others do no better themselves. I have in mind one who, after several evenings' work in finding his authorities from slipshod citations, published in his own bibliography this item. "Cent. f. Chir. Beilage, p. 37." Only this and nothing more. Another published a short list containing these: "Bost. M. & S. J." and "Hagner, Oct. 13, 1906." What is the purpose of such references? I pause for a reply. It is to laugh. But this is not so comic as it is tragic. An hour, or three, may not be such a great matter in time lost if it is only for one man. It is tragic in that many men in many times in many places all will lose that much, if they use such bibliographic blunders. To the librarian who handles such material every day, the bibliography assumes a real importance. At times he is led to believe that many writers look on correctness of reference as a countryman looked on the giraffe when he said, "There ain't no such animal."

That bibliographic style is open to improvement seems plain. Three channels are open through which this improvement can and should proceed: First, through a cooperative policy among medical journals and publishers in insisting on certain bibliographic standards; second, through the cooperation with them of medical libraries; and, third, through literary and bibliographic courses in medical schools. Certain, or uncertain, steps are being taken in this direction, but they lack coordination.

I shall not be surprised to find mistakes in spelling, grammar, and style, and even "rong references" in my own paper. I shall at least have tried to show what right references are; though, in this sketchy paper, I have not said the half of what I would like to, nor is what I have said half emphatic enough. I hope I have done something to put the bibliography on a footing of its own, to give it half



a chance. As long as man is human mistakes will occur. The personal equation, human nature, the imp of the perverse, all take a hand in making the wrong appear right. Of that I cannot complain. What I do ask for is an *attempt* at completeness, an *attempt* at correctness and consistency in bibliographic style.

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